

3/2/2022

As a parent of both a current Agriscience student and a student who has since graduated from the program, my family unfortunately knows all too well the firsthand difficulties Agriscience students encounter when trying to access their statutory right to receive such programming. I have testified in support of similar bills in the past because the issues are real, problematic, and the need for legislative action is overdue. The central dilemma is this: towns are disincentivized to support students who want to attend an Agriscience Center because of the town's tuition and transportation requirement. The financial burden is particularly problematic for small towns with dwindling high school populations and extremely limited resources such as my town, East Windsor. I have attended many BOE meetings throughout the past five years to advocate for the families and students who want access to Agriscience Centers and the repeated refrain is that funding for Agriscience students directly diminishes and negatively impacts resources for the local schools. Because the expenditure for Agriscience tuition doesn't contribute to the operation of town schools, there is little incentive to support it. Now consider the further consequences of this funding structure: local towns control the transportation to and to a large extent, the flow of information to middle school students about their Agriscience options. The result is that students wishing to attend Agriscience Centers run into created, local obstacles designed to deter access. This dynamic is well-known and documented in many communities throughout the state. It should be noted students who wish to access other similar schools of choice within the state do not (fortunately) have to navigate this difficult, oppositional structure.

Please support Bill #5283 to finally address the chronic funding and parity issues that have existed for several decades. Agriscience Centers offer all the hallmarks of exceptional secondary education: workforce development, hands-on learning, community service, leadership, STEM, capstone projects and early college credit.

Sincerely,

*Michaela Mullarkey*

East Windsor (Broad Brook), CT